



# Social Security

Your Right To Question  
A Decision Made On Your  
Supplemental Security  
Income (SSI) Claim

[www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov)

# Your Right To Question A Decision Made On Your Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Claim

**W**e want to be sure that you get all of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits you are eligible to receive. We carefully look at all of the facts before we make a decision about your SSI.

If we decide you do not qualify for SSI payments, or if you disagree with our decision because it was unfavorable or only partly favorable to you, you can appeal our decision. That means you can ask us to look at your case again.

When you ask for an appeal, we will look at the entire decision, not just the part you disagree with. If our decision was wrong, we will change it.

There are four levels of appeal depending on the issue being appealed. If you are not satisfied with the decision at one level, you may appeal to the next. The levels are:

- Reconsideration;
- Hearing by an administrative law judge;
- Appeals Council review; and
- Federal court.

## When and how to appeal

The most important thing to remember about an appeal is the timeframe during which you can ask for one.

Generally, you have 60 days from the date of the letter telling you about our decision. We assume you get our letter within five days after the date on the decision letter, unless you can show us you got it later.

If you do not appeal within the 60-day time limit, you may lose your right to appeal and the last decision we made becomes final. For example, if you do not ask for a reconsideration within 60 days, you may lose your right to have your case reconsidered.

If you have a good reason for not appealing your case within the time limits, we may give you more time. A request for more time must be made to us in writing, stating the reason for the delay.

When the last day of a time limit is on a Saturday, Sunday or national holiday, the time limit ends on the next workday.

You must put your request to appeal in writing. You can call us and ask for the appeal form or send us a signed note with your Social Security number stating that you wish to appeal the decision in your case.

## Continuation of payments

In some cases, if you ask for an appeal within 10 days after the date you receive our letter, your payments will continue while we make a decision on your appeal.

If your appeal is turned down, you may have to pay back any money you were not eligible to get.

## Your right to representation

You may choose to have someone help you with your appeal or to represent you. Your representative may be a lawyer or other qualified person familiar with you and the SSI program. We will work with your representative just as we would work with you. He or she can act for you in most Social Security matters and will receive a copy of any decisions we make about your claim.

Your representative cannot charge or collect a fee from you without first getting written approval from us.

If you want more information about having a representative, contact us and request the publication, *Your Right To Representation* (Publication No. 05-10075). Also, we can give you the names and phone numbers of some organizations that may represent you for free.

## Reconsideration

A reconsideration is a complete review of your claim by someone who did not take part in the first decision. That person will look at all the evidence used to make the original decision, plus any new evidence.

If you are appealing a decision about your medical condition, your reconsideration will be handled by a process we call case review. If you are appealing any other decision, you can choose either a case review, an informal conference or a formal conference. They are explained below.

- **Case review:** In this kind of reconsideration, we look at your case without meeting with you. But you have the right to see what is in your file before we look at your case. You also can give us more information about your case.
- **Informal conference:** Just like a case review, you can look at your file and give us more information. You also can come to the conference and tell the person who will be looking at your case why you disagree with our first decision. You can bring witnesses to talk about your case. And you can bring your representative, if you have one, to the conference.

- **Formal conference:** This method is available if we change or stop your payment. A formal conference allows you to question witnesses and we can require witnesses to appear.

When we make a decision on your reconsideration, we will send you a letter explaining the decision.

## Hearing

If you disagree with the reconsideration decision, you may ask for a hearing. The hearing will be conducted by an administrative law judge who had no part in the original decision or the reconsideration. Before the hearing, we may ask you to give us more evidence and to clarify information about your claim.

You and your representative, if you have one, should come to the hearing and explain your case in person. You may look at the information in your file and give new information. The hearing usually is held within 75 miles of your home. The administrative law judge will notify you of the time and place of the hearing.

At the hearing, the administrative law judge will question you and any witnesses you bring. Other witnesses such as medical or vocational experts

also may give us information at the hearing. You or your representative also may question the witnesses.

It is usually to your advantage to attend the hearing. If you do not wish to do so, you must tell us in writing that you do not want to attend. If you are unable to attend the hearing, you should tell us why, and we may be able to make other arrangements for you.

In certain situations, we may hold your hearing by a video conference rather than in person. We will let you know ahead of time if this is the case. With video hearings, we can make the hearing more convenient for you. Often an appearance by video hearing can be scheduled faster than an in-person appearance. Also, a video hearing location may be closer to your home. That might make it easier for you to have witnesses or other people accompany you.

Unless the administrative law judge believes your presence is necessary to decide your case and requires you to attend, you will not have to attend. The judge will make a decision based on all the information in your case, including any new information you give.

When the administrative law judge makes a decision, we will send you a letter and a copy of the decision.

If you disagree with the hearing decision made by the administrative law judge, you may ask for a review by Social Security's Appeals Council.

The Appeals Council looks at all requests for review, but it may deny a request if it believes the hearing decision was correct. If the Appeals Council denies your request for review, you will get a letter explaining the denial.

If the Appeals Council decides to review your case, the Council will either decide your case itself or issue an order returning your case to an administrative law judge for further action.

If the Appeals Council decides your case itself, we will send you a copy of the decision. If the Appeals Council returns your case to an administrative law judge, we will send you a letter and a copy of the order.

## Federal court

If you disagree with the Appeals Council's decision or if the Appeals Council decides not to review your case, you may file a lawsuit in a federal district court.

## Contacting Social Security

For more information and to find copies of our publications, visit our website at **[www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov)** or call toll-free, **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We can answer specific questions and provide information by automated phone service 24 hours a day.

We treat all calls confidentially. We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service. That is why we have a second Social Security representative monitor some telephone calls.





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